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No Place in CIA For Politician Bush

The viability of the Central Intelligence Agency as a non-partisan, impartial gatherer and analyzer of information will be even more difficult to sell with a politician and possible vice presidential candidate at its helm.

The nomination last week by President Ford of former Republican Party Chairman George Bush to replace CIA chief William Colby signals more than any of the other administration shifts the strong political overtones of the President's personnel changes and unfortunately feeds doubts over whether the changes on the Ford "team" are for the good of the country.

While there is no doubt George Bush is an able administrator and probably could effectively oversee reorganization needed in the CIA, his political connections would stand in the way of his ever being able to keep partisanship out of the agency. Congressional concerns that under Bush the agency could be turned into a political arm of the White House are well founded. This factor alone places on the agency further strain hardly needed if its ability to collect vital information is to be maintained.

The hearings have already opened too many of the CIA's operations to worldwide scrutiny and impaired the effectiveness of the agency. Confirmation hearings for Bush may embroil the agency in still more unwelcome controversy.

President Ford's firing of Colby in the midst of the Congressional hearings into charges of CIA misdeeds of the past is surprising. Colby has handled himself well during the hearings while managing to continue the intelligence operations of the agency.

Greater faith in the wisdom of Ford's appointment of Bush would have been elicited had not the President backtracked somewhat when he had to request that Colby stay on until the conclusion of the hearings.

That the CIA has in the past illegally used the strength of its investigative forces to foster the internal political ends of another administration has been demonstrated in the hearings. The revelations of these activities undoubtedly will do much to see that the vast technology of the agency is not used against Americans in the future. For this reason alone the hearings have been a great national service.

But it may also be that such disclosures have given aid and comfort to others in the world not so anxious to protect the safety and privacy of individual Americans. Therefore, any further erosion of the security of the CIA may irreparably damage the future effectiveness of the agency.

Confirmation hearings for Bush as Colby's successor may succeed in destroying the agency more surely than any activity initiated by a foreign government.

Nominations for cabinet positions are rarely denied confirmation. But the head of the CIA is not a cabinet position and consequently will not enjoy the velvet touch frequently given such high level appointments.

However, with Sen. Frank Church, himself a Democratic presidential contender, sounding one of the first public criticisms, the political cast of the pending confirmation hearings seems irrevocably set. Senator Church's criticism of the appointment is the tip-off that the CIA should gird itself for further investigations.

Because politics should not be an issue in the naming of the CIA director and because the effectiveness of the agency may be further undermined by additional hearings, it may be expedient for President Ford to backtrack still further and withdraw the Bush nomination.